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ABSTRACT

This study examines the characteristics and work environments of child care personnel employed by 80 day care centers throughout Alberta. Findings indicated that, on average, child care staff had higher levels of education than the general adult population in the province. Considerable mobility within the child care field was found. Staff with early childhood postsecondary qualifications were the most likely to stay in the field for more than 5 years. Caregivers were very committed to their work. However, this commitment did not always translate into professional involvement in the field. Financial compensation for caregivers was related to years of postsecondary education, early childhood education, and years of experience. A majority of caregivers received no job benefits other than those required by legislation. Caregivers expressed strong satisfaction with many aspects of their work, describing it as important, interesting, and rewarding. They were equally dissatisfied with certain other aspects. Turnover rates were high and were related to low salaries. Training for child care personnel was supported by all groups. Recommendations for further study are offered. (22 graphs, 31 references) (RH)

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Those Who Care

A Report on Child Caregivers in Alberta Daycare Centres

June
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Principal Investigators
Annette LaGrange
Malcolm Read

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> ***It is more important than ever that the child care community accurately portray who we are rather than reflect and reinforce long held and damaging stereotypes. (Phillips and Whitebook, 1986).***

INTRODUCTION

The study *Those Who Care* examines the characteristics and work environments of child care personnel employed by 80 day care centres throughout Alberta. Data were collected between November 1989 and May 1990. Information on centre characteristics was obtained in telephone interviews with directors. Child caregivers and centre directors completed written surveys to provide information on their personal and educational backgrounds, child care experiences, wages and benefits, and on their levels of job satisfaction. Five months after the written surveys were completed, further telephone interviews with 100 caregivers provided information on staff turnover.

Background

Research on child care throughout the past 20 years has explored the effects on children of non-maternal versus maternal care and has focussed on such questions as: "Is day care good or bad for children?" (Goelman and Pence, 1985; Phillips and Howes, 1987; Belsky, 1980). More recently, researchers have shifted emphasis in an attempt to determine which factors in child care, the home and within society effect children's growth and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Goelman and Pence, 1985). The characteristics of child caregivers and their work environments have been increasingly identified as key factors in determining child experiences and outcomes (Phillips and Whitebook, 1986).

The National Day Care Study (Ruopp, Travers, Glantz and Coelen, 1979) pointed to the positive impact of formal education on the quality of care provided for children. This finding has been reaffirmed several times in the past decade (Berk, 1985; Stallings and Porter, 1980; Howes, 1983 and Arnett, 1989). *The National Child Care Staffing Study* concluded, "Teaching staff with more formal education and higher levels of specialized early childhood training interacted more effectively with children" (Whitebook, Howes and Phillips, 1989, p.158).

Within Alberta, which had no regulated training standards at the time of the study, a recent government report indicated that 40% of centre directors and 25% of day care workers held at least a one-year post-secondary qualification in early childhood education (Alberta Health and Social Services Disciplines Committee, 1988).

The staffing crisis in early childhood care and education (Granger, 1989; Morin, 1989) has focussed attention on those factors which enable and encourage child care staff to remain in their jobs (Phillips and Whitebook, 1986). Caregiver stability, or continuity of caregiving,

has been reported as an important variable in any description of quality child care (Cummings,1980).

The National Child Care Staffing Study (Whitebook et al., 1989) reported turnover rates of 41% per year as reported by centre directors and 37% over six months as reported by caregivers. Within Alberta, the Health and Social Services Disciplines Committee (1988) reported an average turnover rate of 26% per year, with a range from 16% to 37%.

Jorde-Bloom (1986, 1988) developed measures of job satisfaction and work attitudes of personnel involved in early childhood care and education. Krueger reported that child care workers become dissatisfied because of "low wages, overly demanding working conditions, inadequate decision involvement, limited opportunities for advancement and minimal public support and recognition" (Krueger, 1982, p.5). Whitebook, Howes and Phillips (1989) found that the most important predictor of child care quality and turnover is staff wages.

While few studies of child care salary levels in Alberta have been made, it is generally acknowledged that they are low. In 1985, Schom-Moffat reported average salaries of $7.60 across the prairie provinces. A survey of college early childhood graduates (Early Childhood Professional Association of Alberta, 1983), who were all full-time personnel employed at day care centres, indicated salaries of approximately $7.20 per hour.

Low salaries as characteristic of child care working conditions are often compounded by minimal benefit packages (Benson, 1985; Whitebook et al., 1989; Gaines, 1979). Little information has been gathered from within Alberta. However, Schom-Moffat, in her report on wages and benefits across Canada, states, "the majority of workers receive few job benefits of any kind" (Schom-Moffatt, 1985, p.108). Approximately 25% of the respondents to a college graduate survey (ECPAA, 1983) commented on the poor working conditions in the child care field.

This study provides a description and examination of the relationships between caregiver characteristics and their work environments in Alberta.

HIGHLIGHTS OF FINDINGS

ON AVERAGE, CHILD CARE STAFF HAD HIGHER LEVELS OF EDUCATION THAN THE GENERAL ADULT POPULATION IN ALBERTA.

➤ Sixty percent of child care staff had some post-secondary experience. Forty-five percent had post-secondary qualifications as compared with 35% of the general adult population in Alberta.

Forty-six percent of centre directors and 31% of caregivers had specific qualifications in early childhood care/education.

Eighty percent of caregivers without post-secondary qualifications worked at private centres. Eighty percent of caregivers at public centres had post-secondary qualifications.

THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE MOBILITY WITHIN THE CHILD CARE FIELD. STAFF WITH EARLY CHILDHOOD POST-SECONDARY QUALIFICATIONS WERE THE MOST LIKELY TO STAY IN THE FIELD FOR MORE THAN FIVE YEARS.

➤ Forty percent of caregivers had been in the field for more than five years, although 60% had been at their current centre for less than two years. Only 15% had been at the same centre for five years.

Seventy-three percent of directors had been in the field for more than five years. No director had been in the field for less than one year. Thirty-five percent had been at the same centre for five years.

CAREGIVERS WERE VERY COMMITTED TO THEIR WORK. HOWEVER, THIS COMMITMENT DID NOT ALWAYS TRANSLATE INTO PROFESSIONAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE FIELD.

➤ Seventy-four percent of caregivers viewed their work as long-term. Eighty-three percent of caregivers with early childhood training viewed working in child care as a long-term career.

Fewer than 25% of caregivers belonged to a professional organization or subscribed to a professional journal.

Attendance at conferences or workshops was the most popular professional activity.

FINANCIAL COMPENSATION FOR CAREGIVERS WAS RELATED TO YEARS OF POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION, EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND YEARS OF EXPERIENCE.

➤ The average wage for all full-time staff was $7.44 per hour.

For caregivers, the average wage was $6.79 per hour, for directors, $10.76 per hour.

Almost 50% of caregivers earned $6.00 per hour or less.

Caregiver salaries were less than 66% of the average wage paid to women, and approximately 40% of the average wage paid to men in the Alberta labour force.

Almost 30% of caregivers either did not understand or did not know how wage increases were determined at their centre.

A MAJORITY OF CAREGIVERS RECEIVED NO JOB BENEFITS OTHER THAN THOSE REQUIRED BY LEGISLATION.

➤ Caregivers who received the fewest benefits also received the lowest wages, and anticipated staying in the field for a shorter time.

CAREGIVERS EXPRESSED STRONG SATISFACTION WITH MANY ASPECTS OF THEIR WORK, DESCRIBING IT AS IMPORTANT, INTERESTING AND REWARDING. THEY WERE EQUALLY DISSATISFIED WITH SOME OTHER ASPECTS.

➤ Seventy-five percent of caregivers would choose child care careers if they were to do it all again.

Fifty-three percent would recommend child care careers to friends.

Seventy-five percent of child care staff expressed the view that child care had a much lower status in society than other jobs.

TURNOVER RATES WERE VERY HIGH AND WERE RELATED TO LOW SALARIES.

➤ Directors reported a 12-month turnover rate of 43%.

Seventeen percent of caregivers had left the child care field within five months of the study.

A further 12% changed jobs in the child care field within five months.

Low salaries, ill-health and job stress were the primary reasons for staff leaving.

Directors described staff recruitment as very difficult

TRAINING FOR CHILD CARE PERSONNEL WAS SUPPORTED BY ALL GROUPS.

➤ Eighty-seven percent of caregivers and directors would upgrade their skills in order to meet new training requirements

Only 12% would leave the field rather than upgrade their training.

The majority of caregivers and directors would upgrade their qualifications on condition that there was either financial assistance, or that training was available locally and did not involve leaving their jobs.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Sample

The sample used in this study was selected to represent day care centres in Alberta by location and auspice. Centre auspice is identified in this study by the terms public or private. Public centres are non-profit and are sponsored by parent cooperations, churches, municipalities and non-profit community agencies or societies. Private centres are for-profit and are owned locally or are franchised.

A stratified random sampling technique ensured that each of the six regions of the province was represented in proportion to the total number of child care spaces. A cluster sampling technique selected caregiver respondents.

Centre sample by location

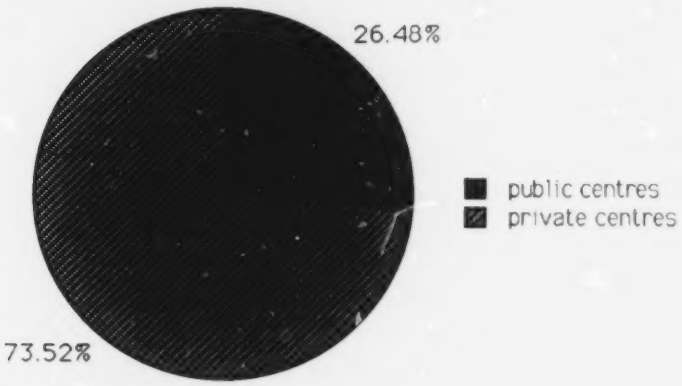
REGION	1	2	3	4	5	6	TOTALS
TOTAL NUMBER OF CENTRES	22	24	326	46	220	46	684
AVERAGE SIZE OF CENTRES	42	43	44	45	56	43	46
NUMBER OF CENTRES IN SAMPLE	5(4)	5(4)	50(36)	7(7)	35(24)	6(5)	108(80)
AVERAGE SIZE OF CENTRES IN SAMPLE	49	41	43	48	57	43	47

Figures taken from, Day Care Centres Operating in the Northwestern (1), Northeastern(2), Edmonton(3), Innisfail(4), Calgary(5) and Southern(6) Regions, October 1988, Alberta Family and Social Services: Day Care Branch.

Numbers in parenthesis indicate centres which responded to all stages of the study.

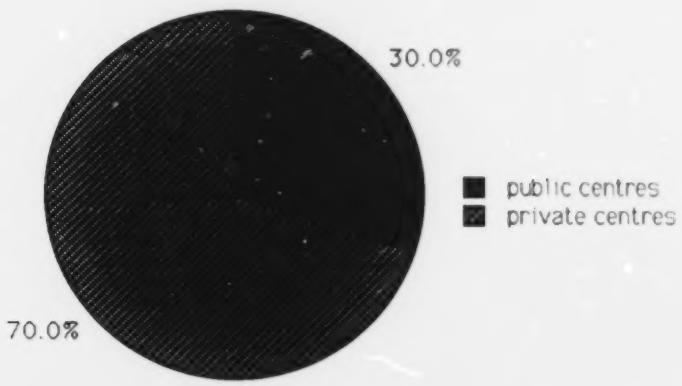
Provincial centres: by auspice

Total number of active day care centres: 661*



Sample centres: by auspice

Total number of day care centres in sample: 80

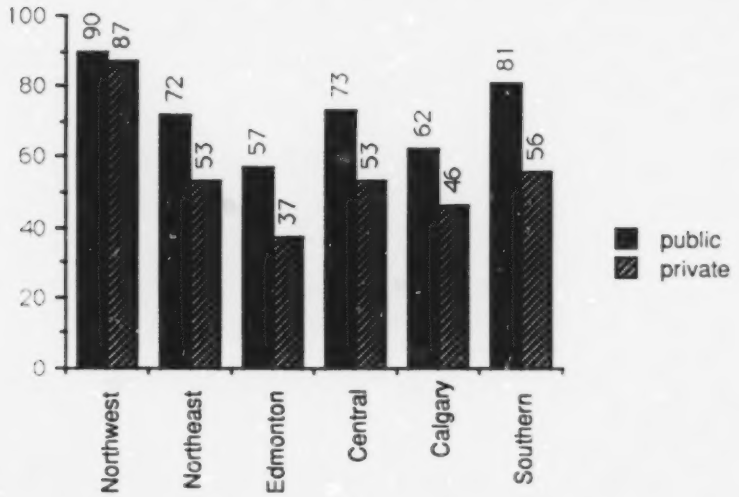


**Number of active day care centres by auspice provided by Alberta Family and Social Services, March 1990.*

Seventy-four percent (80/108) of eligible child day care centres agreed to participate in the study. Of those which declined, eight did so at the time of the initial telephone contact and a further 20 chose not to respond after receiving the questionnaire. The eight centres which refused the initial contact were from Edmonton and Calgary, and no information was gathered from them. The 20 centres which chose not to respond at the point of receiving questionnaires did provide some information. Eleven centres were in Edmonton, six in Calgary and three in other regions of the province. Seventeen (85%) were privately owned or sponsored and three (15%) were from the public sector.

Of those centres which agreed to participate, responses to the written questionnaires varied. In general, caregivers who were employed at public centres were more likely to respond, as were caregivers in rural regions. The lowest response rates were received from private centres in Edmonton and Calgary.

Caregiver response rate by region and auspice



Total response to written questionnaire – 340/607 (56%)

MEASURES AND PROCEDURES

Director interviews

The director of each selected centre was interviewed by telephone. This interview, approximately 30 minutes in length, gathered information on the centre's auspice, size and location. The director also described the staffing turnover within the past 12 months, the monthly fees charged to parents and the amount of non-government financial support the centre received.

Written questionnaire

A written questionnaire containing 60 questions was developed as the main instrument in this investigation. Since it was considered important to collect data which would provide a comprehensive picture of caregivers and their work environments, the questionnaire was lengthy and required approximately 45 minutes to complete.

The questionnaire contained a number of questions either the same as, or similar to, those asked in other surveys of caregivers. This was done to allow for ease of comparison both with previous studies completed in Alberta (Alberta Health and Social Services Disciplines

Committee,1988), and with studies completed elsewhere (Pence and Goelman, 1987; Schom-Moffatt, 1985; Whitebook, Howes and Phillips, 1989).

The questions sought information about the educational and personal backgrounds of the caregivers, their work experience in child care and their wages and benefits. One other section, which asked a series of questions about job satisfaction, was used in *The National Child Care Staffing Study* (Whitebook et al., 1989). These questions, originally developed by Jorde-Bloom (Early Childhood Work Attitudes Survey, 1986), assess satisfaction with decision-making, compensation, social status, supervision and work commitment.

The written questionnaires were piloted with the assistance of three centre directors and 17 child caregivers from six different centres.

Together with stamped-return envelopes, the revised questionnaires were sent to each centre with a request that each staff person complete and return a copy within seven days. Follow up telephone contacts were made with each centre within the seven days, and reminder letters were mailed 10 days later. Six hundred and seven questionnaires were distributed and 340 (56%) completed and returned.

Caregiver Interviews

Five months after the written surveys, 100 respondents were randomly selected and interviewed by telephone to obtain data on turnover rates. They were asked about their current job status and, where applicable, their reasons for leaving the day care. Centre directors had previously indicated the number of staff who had left within the 12 months prior to this study.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the study was to describe the backgrounds and working conditions of child care personnel. The areas examined were:

Caregiver characteristics: including formal education, early childhood education, experience in child care and personal background.

Caregiver work environment: including wages and benefits, working conditions and measures of job satisfaction.

Caregiver turnover: including a 12-month director's report, a five-month caregiver report, and statements of intent and patterns of movement from caregivers.

Centre characteristics: including auspice, location and size.

Note: The Chi-square Test of Independence and the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation were used to examine the associations among variables. Unless otherwise stated, all relationships reported in the findings are statistically significant at $p < .05$. They could only have occurred by chance one time in 20.

LICENSED CHILD DAY CARE IN ALBERTA

Standards of care at day care centres are set out in the *Social Care Facilities Licensing Act: Day Care Regulations* of 1981. They are re-stated, with interpretations, in the *Day Care Licensing Policy Manual* of 1987.

In these, a day care centre is defined as: "a facility that provides care, development and supervision for seven or more children under the age of six years for more than three consecutive hours per day but less than 24 consecutive hours" (Reg. 1).

Regulations regarding staffing standards

"No person under 18 years shall be solely responsible for the care or well-being of children in a day care facility." However, "a person under the age of 18 may function as an assistant under the supervision of an adult primary staff person" (Reg. 38:1 and 2).

"In every day care centre at least one staff member shall be the holder of a valid certificate in the first aid treatment" (Reg 16.).

Alberta had no regulations with regard to the education or qualification of child day care staff. However, one-year certificate, two-year diploma and four-year degree programmes in Early Childhood Development/Education have been available at community and vocational colleges and universities for almost 20 years.

Regulations regarding ratio and group size

AGES OF CHILDREN	RATIO	MAXIMUM GROUP SIZE
0–18 months	1:3	2:6
19–35 months	1:5	2:10
3–4 years	1:8	2:16
5 years	1:10	2:20

Other regulations

Regulations governing programme content, health and safety practices, physical plant and equipment needs are also in place (*Day Care Licensing Policy Manual*, 1987).

Funding support

An operating allowance programme provides funding support to centres licensed prior to November 1986. Payment, based on the age and attendance of each child, is:

AGE OF CHILDREN	MONTHLY ALLOWANCE
0–18 months	$257.00
19–35 months	$131.00
3–4 years	$ 78.50
5 years	$ 65.00

A child care subsidy programme is available to assist low income families. Subsidy

payment is based on the size and income of the family.

Maximum subsidy rates are $280.00 per child per month, with parents required to pay $40.00 for the first eligible child (Alberta Social Services: Child Care Programmes, 1989).

An Integrated Day Care programme provides funding support to day care centres which integrate children with special needs.

SURVEY RESULTS

The survey provides information about the backgrounds and working conditions of staff employed at child day care centres in Alberta in the fall of 1989. All following information refers to full-time staff and to both caregivers and directors unless otherwise indicated. The quotations included with the survey results are taken from comments made by respondents. Eighty-four percent of respondents were caregivers and 16% were directors.

Demographic characteristics

Ninety-eight percent of caregivers in this study were female. The majority (82%) were 40 years of age or younger with the largest group (41%) between the ages of 18–25. Eighty percent were born in Canada. Fifty-nine percent were married or living with a partner, and 42% had children living at home. Thirty percent had children under the age of six, and 33% had children between six and 18 years of age.

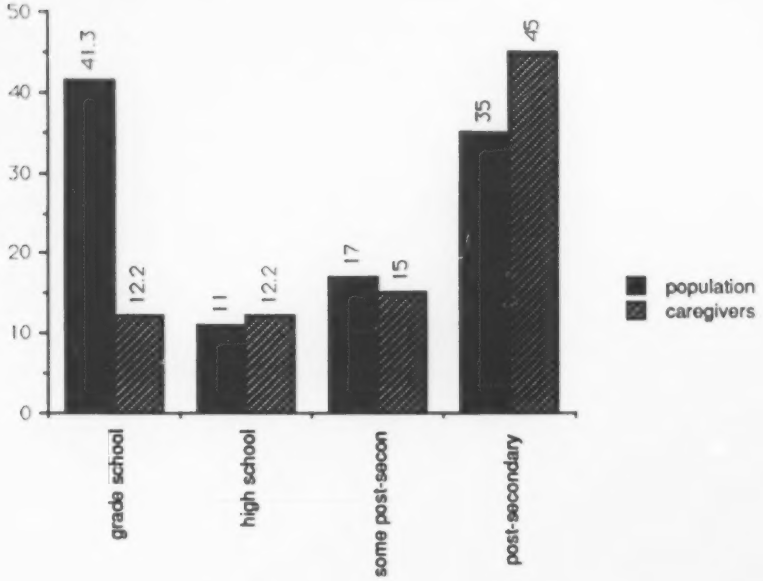
Educational background

> ***Insisting that all child care workers achieve a minimum of two years of post-secondary education and increasing salaries in accordance would do much to improve society's image of child care.***
>
> ***I would enjoy taking early childhood education, but can't afford to not work.***

A focus of this survey was to determine the current levels of professional preparation of child caregivers and directors.

Sixty-one percent of all personnel employed in child care had post-secondary qualifications, and as a group personnel had higher educational qualifications than the typical Alberta labour force (Statistics Canada, 1987).

Highest level of education: Child care staff and Alberta adult population

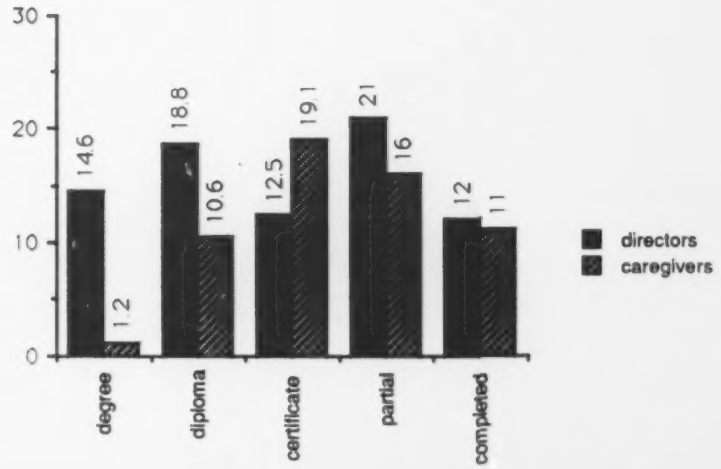


Population figures from Statistics Canada, 1987.

Forty-six percent of directors and 31% of caregivers had specific early childhood post-secondary qualifications.

Twelve percent of directors and 11% of caregivers had some course work in early childhood education at the post-secondary level. Twenty-one percent of directors and 16 percent of caregivers were currently engaged in post-secondary studies.

Early childhood qualifications: Caregivers and directors



There was a significant difference between the educational levels of staff at public and private centres. Eighty-one percent of caregivers at public centres had post-secondary qualifications versus 43% of caregivers at private centres.

Eighty percent of caregivers who did not have post-secondary qualifications worked at private centres.

No significant differences were found in the proportion of staff with post-secondary and specific early childhood qualifications and the size of the community in which they worked.

Work experience

"

I have worked with children for 25 years and find it very rewarding.

I have raised four children of my own, also have six grandchildren and was a teacher's aide – I love children and feel this is a good career.

I have been a caregiver for six years and really enjoy the children. Now I need to find a job that is more secure and less stressful.

"

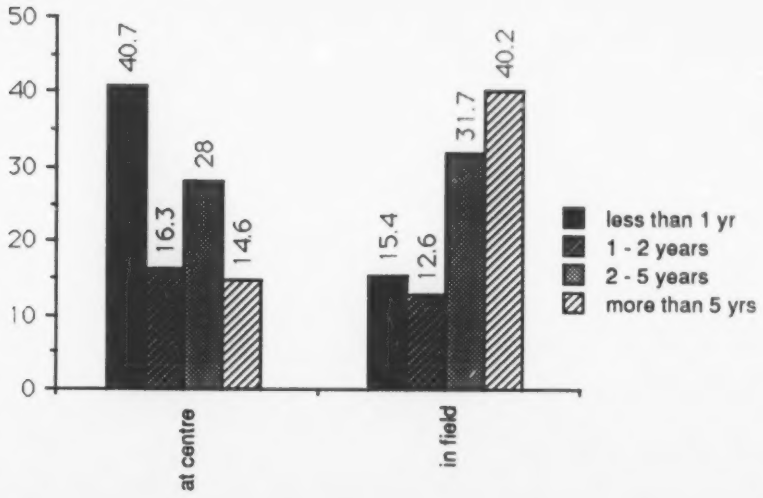
The length of time that personnel remain in the field is an important consideration for child care in Alberta. Other studies indicate that the caregiver's level and type of formal education predict appropriate caregiver behavior (Arnett, 1989), and that years of experience are unrelated. Information predicting which caregivers are most likely to stay in child care is important in decision-making about where to maximize investment in educational preparation of child care staff.

Centre directors had considerable experience. Seventy-three percent had been in the field for more than five years; none had been in the field for less than one year. Child caregivers were less experienced. Fifteen percent had been in the field for less than one year and 40% had been in the field for at least five years.

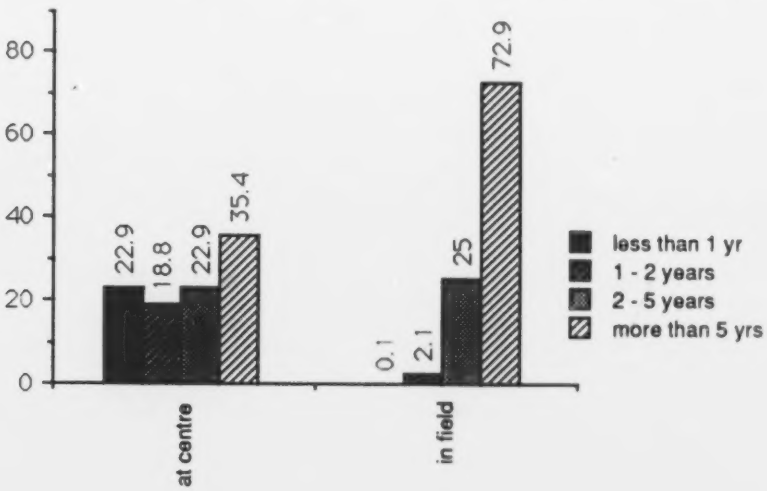
Both directors and caregivers had less experience at the centre in which they were employed at the time of the survey than they had in the child care field. While 73% of directors had been in the field for more than five years, only 35% had been at their current child care centre for more than five years.

Variations in experience point to considerable mobility within the child care field. Almost 60% of caregivers had been at their current centre for less than two years and fewer than 15% had been at the same centre for five years. However, 40% of caregivers had been at the child care field for at least five years and 28% had been in the field less than two years.

Years of experience at current centre and in child care field: Caregivers



Years of experience at current centre and in child care field: Directors



There was a significant relationship between educational preparation and years of experience. Those staff who had been in the field for more than five years were more likely to have post-secondary rather than grade school education (70% with post-secondary qualifications versus 29% without). Most of the staff who had been in the field for less than one year had no post-secondary background (41% with post-secondary qualifications versus 59% without).

Those with early childhood post-secondary education were more likely to be in the field after five years than were those with other post-secondary qualifications (78% with early childhood education versus 22% with other post-secondary qualifications).

There was no relationship between the length of time worked at the current centre and centre auspice. However, caregivers employed by private centres had less experience in the field than caregivers employed by public centres. Sixty-four percent of caregivers with less than one year of experience worked at private centres and 58% of caregivers with more than five years of experience worked at public centres.

Professional commitment and involvement

> ***"Better access to child care courses would help, as well as some government support for day care centres that bring in relevant workshops.***
>
> ***I enjoy the job because it is very satisfying and the possibilities are endless...the field is on the brink of a new era; it will expand greatly and its importance will be recognized."***

Child care staff appear to be highly committed to the child care field. Seventy-four percent viewed their work as a long-term career. Eighty-three percent of those with early childhood education viewed their work as long-term as compared with 67% of all other staff. *The National Child Care Staffing Study* (Whitebook et al., 1989) also found that those with specialized early childhood training were more likely to view their jobs as long-term careers.

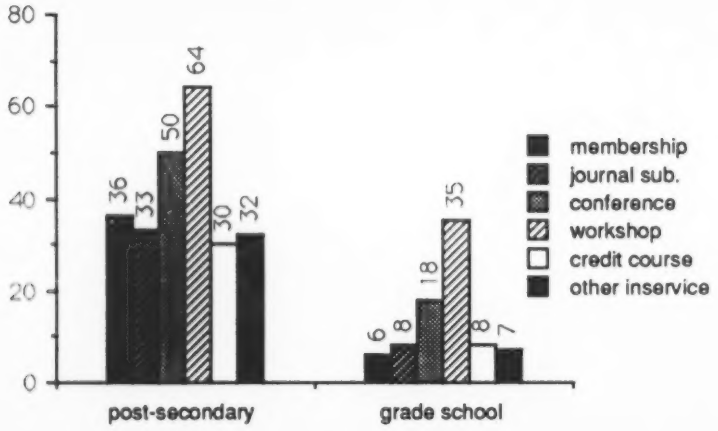
Caregivers who viewed their career as long-term were likely to earn more – $7.70 per hour versus $6.78 per hour for those who saw caregiving as short-term.

Commitment to work in child care did not always translate into other forms of professional involvement. Only 24% of all staff belonged to professional organizations. Those who were members of professional organizations were most likely to be directors (50% versus 18% for child caregivers), work at a public centre (41% versus 11% at private centres) and have post-secondary education (36% versus 6% for grade school). No significant difference was evident for those with specialized training in early childhood versus those with other types of post-secondary education.

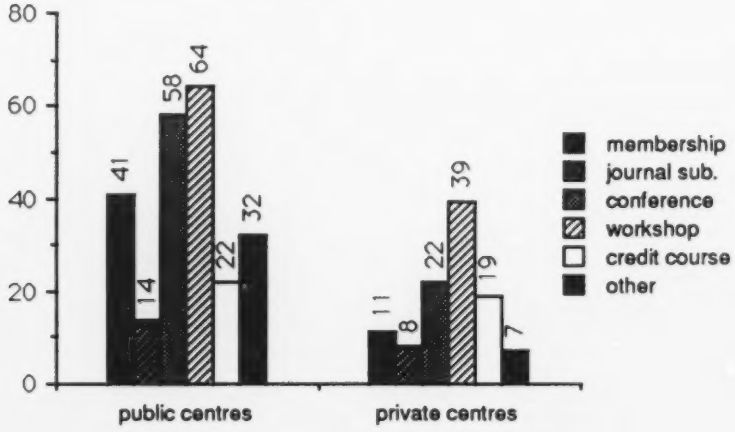
Staff who were members of professional organizations earned an average of $9.76 per hour compared with $7.18 per hour for those who were not.

Professional involvement was also associated with level of education, centre auspice and position.

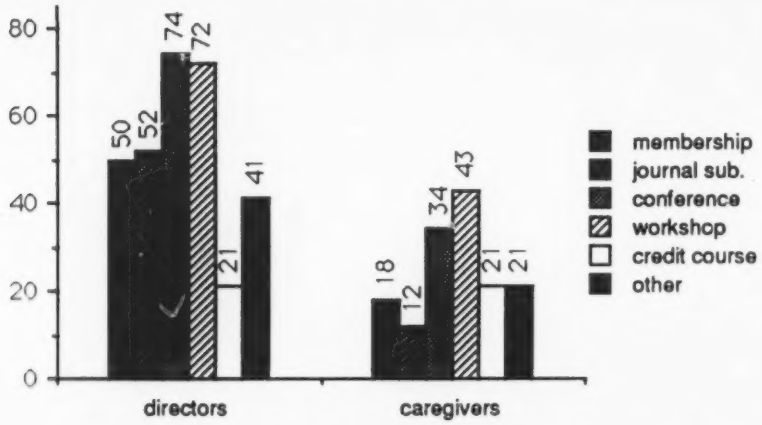
Professional Involvement: Percentage of staff with post-secondary qualifications and staff without post-secondary qualifications



Professional Involvement: Percentage of staff employed at public and private centres



Professional Involvement: Caregivers and directors



Staff wages

"

You can't earn a living wage.

Our jobs are in trouble. We have no security and the pay is too poor to live on.

I love working with preschool children, but realistically I would have to say I'd choose another child-related field for more money and recognition.

We are paid what any business can afford, and we are paid higher than store staff.

"

Full-time child care staff were usually employed for 40 hours per week, 50 weeks per year.

The average hourly wage for all full-time staff, including directors, was $7.44 per hour, an average yearly wage of $14,123. Those with post-secondary education earned an hourly wage of $8.33 ($16,660 per year), while those without post-secondary qualifications earned $6.06 per hour ($12,120 per year).

Caregivers earned an average of $6.79 per hour, or $13,580 per year. Forty-six percent earned less than $6.00 per hour ($12,000 per year) and only 4% earned $10.00 per hour or more ($20,000 per year).

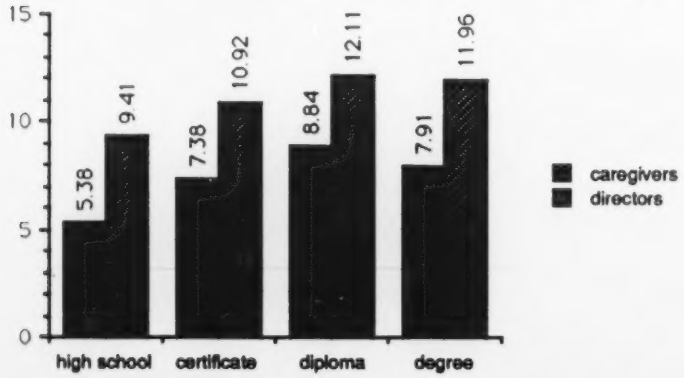
Directors earned approximately $4.00 per hour more than caregivers. They earned an average of $10.76 per hour, and a yearly wage of $21,520.

Wages contributed significantly to total household incomes. The wages of 70% of staff comprised more than 50% of their household income and the wages of 40% of staff comprised more than 75% of their household income. Only 24% of staff contributed less than 25% to their total household income.

Level of education was related to wages, as was position. That is, directors consistently earned more than caregivers, even when less qualified.

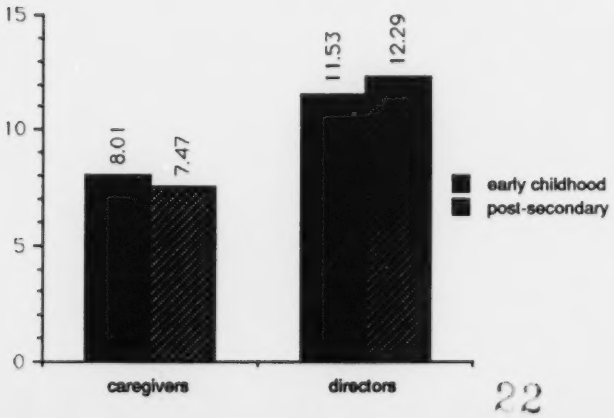
Caregivers and directors with two-year college diplomas typically were the highest paid, earning more than staff with four-year degrees employed in similar positions.

Hourly wage: By level of education and position



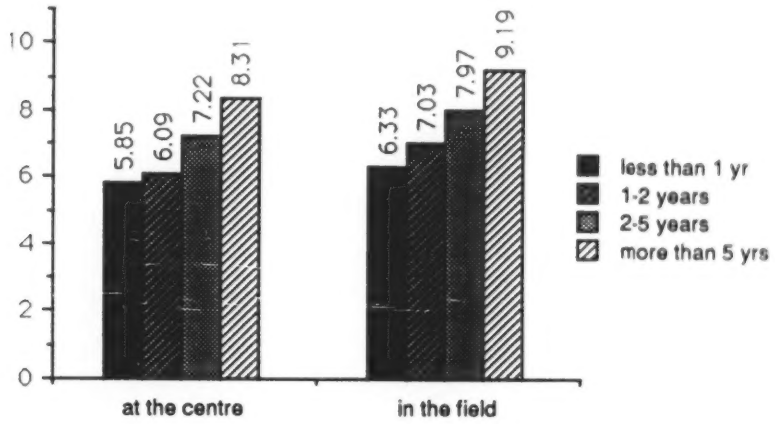
There was no significant difference between wages and the type of post-secondary education (early childhood education versus other types of post-secondary qualifications), but the following table shows that while caregivers with specialized early childhood training earned more than those with other types of post-secondary qualifications, the reverse was true for directors.

Hourly wage: By type of post-secondary education and position



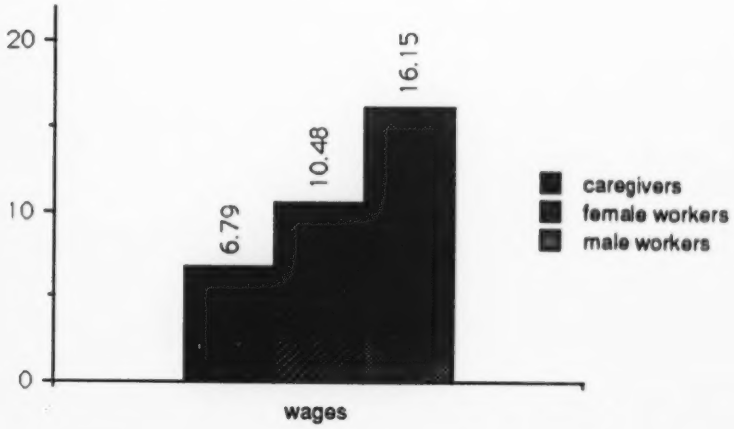
Wages were also related to years of experience, both in the field and at the centre.

Hourly wages: By years of experience at the centre and in the field



Centre auspice was related to wages. Staff employed at public centres earned an average of $9.05 per hour ($18,100 per year), while those employed at private centres earned an average of $6.23 per hour ($12,460 per year). No strong relationship was observed between location of centre and staff wages, although staff working in small towns (less than 5000 people) earned almost $.50 per hour less than their counterparts elsewhere.

Hourly wages: Caregivers and men and women in the Alberta labour force



Hourly wages: Centre directors and men and women in the Alberta labour force

Caregivers earned less than 66% of the average wage paid to women employed full-time in the Alberta labour force, and only 40% of the average wage paid to men employed full-time in the Alberta labour force (Statistics Canada, 1987).

Directors were slightly better off. They earned approximately the same as the average wage paid to all women employed full-time in the Alberta labour force. However, this was only 66% of the average wage paid to men.

These figures are particularly striking given that the child day care personnel were better educated than the general population. Over 60% of caregivers had some post-secondary experience, 45% with post-secondary qualifications, compared with 52% of the general population who had some post-secondary experience, 35% with post-secondary qualifications.

How wages are increased

"

Sometimes we receive a cost of living increase; this year we didn't.

There is no financial incentive in my workplace for doing a better job, only my own personal satisfaction.

"

Wage increases for all staff were determined in various ways. Approximately 30% of caregivers and 55% of directors quoted on-the-job experience, additional education and job performance, as criteria for increasing their wages. However, only 12% of caregivers and 25% of directors received regular cost of living increases. A further 30% of caregivers and 11% of

centre directors reported that pay increases were either unpredictable or they did not know how they were awarded.

Eleven percent of staff (12% of caregivers, 7% of directors) were members of a collective bargaining unit – trade union or similar association. Staff belonging to a collective bargaining unit were more likely to work at public centres (27% versus 0.6% at private centres), to have post-secondary qualifications (25% versus 2% without post-secondary education) and to earn higher wages ($9.37 per hour versus $7.80) than were staff who were not members of a collective bargaining unit.

In addition to their full-time work in child care, 22% of caregivers worked at other jobs for an average of 11 hours per week, and 13% of directors worked at other jobs for an average of seven hours per week in order to augment their child care salaries.

Benefits

"

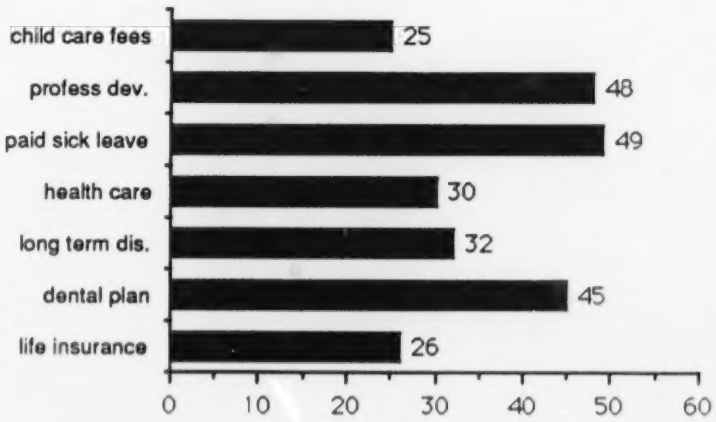
Benefits are very minimal. It would be great if there were more.

Children of staff are not allowed to attend our centre.

"

Fewer than half of child care workers received any benefits other than those required by law – paid vacations or vacation pay, Canada Pension Plan, or Unemployment Insurance, which included maternity and paternity leave.

Job Benefits: Percentage of caregivers receiving benefits



The average number of benefits reported by all staff was 3.2. Centre directors received more benefits (6.2) than caregivers (2.8).

There was a significant difference between those who received benefits and those who did not. Staff who worked at private centres reported the fewest benefits (1.7), compared with staff who worked at public centres (5.2).

Staff who received the fewest benefits earned the lowest wages – there was a significant relationship between wages and each benefit – and were more likely to describe their job as temporary or short-term rather than as a long-term career, and were more likely to state that they anticipated staying in child care for only one additional year.

Those who were members of a collective bargaining unit received more benefits (six) than those who were not (2.8).

The number of benefits received was also related to years of education. Staff with post-secondary qualifications received more benefits than staff without. The average number of benefits received was related to years of education.

GRADE SCHOOL	1.1
CERTIFICATE	4.0
DIPLOMA	5.2
DEGREE	4.6

Staff with diplomas at post-secondary education levels, received more benefits than staff with other qualifications.

Working conditions

"

The conditions at our day care are perfect...our director is excellent.

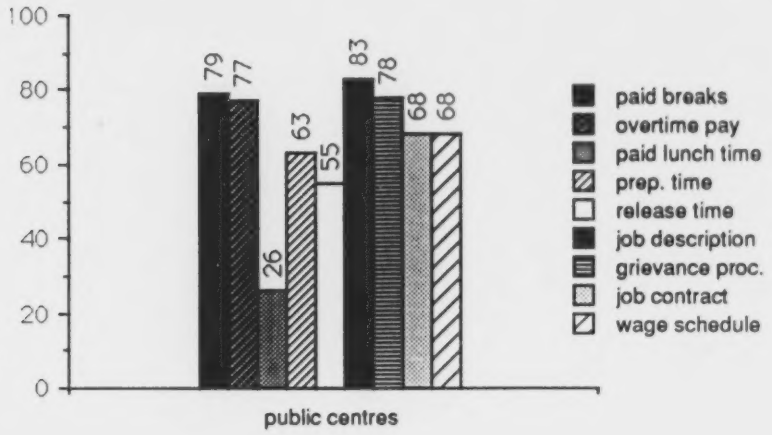
My decisions and opinions don't matter at the centre where I'm employed.

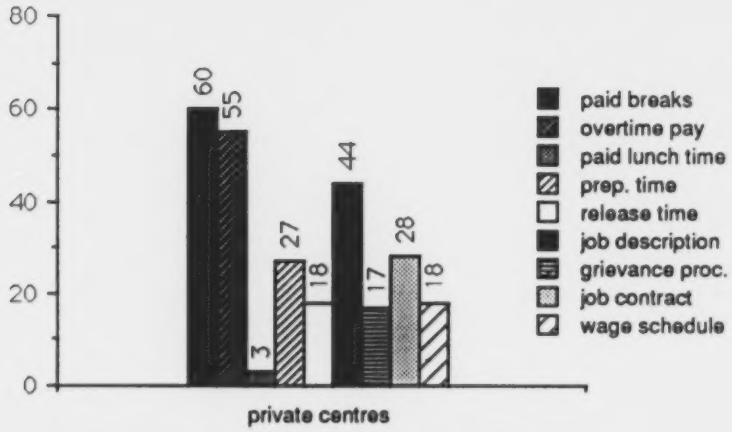
"

Eighty-three percent of caregivers worked with the same group of children for most of each day. The average number of children in the group was 13, with a range from three to 40 children. The average number of adults who worked with each group of children was 3.27, with a range from one to nine. Seventy percent of caregivers spent all of their time working directly with children, and a further 25% spent approximately 75% of their time directly caring for children. A surprising number of directors (43%) also spent most of their time at work directly caring for children.

Working conditions were significantly related to wages and to the auspice of the centre.

Working conditions by auspice





What the caregivers recommended

When asked what they thought would be helpful in improving working conditions for child care workers and encouraging people to stay in the field, child caregivers listed the following:

BETTER SALARY	96%
PROMOTING MORE RESPECT FOR CHILD CAREGIVERS IN TODAY'S SOCIETY	89%
IMPROVING BENEFITS	86%
FEELING MORE APPRECIATED BY THE PARENTS OF THE CHILDREN	78%
ESTABLISHING A CAREER LADDER	70%
PROVIDING REGULARLY SCHEDULED PREPARATION TIME	64%
ONGOING OR CONTINUING EDUCATION	64%

Job satisfaction

"

I love working with children.

The work is challenging and rewarding; it has a lot of variety.

It's a very demanding job and not many people realize how important our job is in today's society. In some cases the child care worker raises the child.

In the eyes of children you are high in status.

"

Child care staff were committed to their work. Seventy-two percent viewed their work as a long-term career, 75% anticipated being in the field for more than five years and 75% would choose child care if they could do it over again. Fifty-three percent would recommend child care as a career to a friend.

How caregivers described their jobs

Child care staff described their jobs positively. On a scale of 1 to 7, where 7 perfectly described the job and 1 did not, caregivers rated their jobs:

IMPORTANT	5.9
INTERESTING	5.6
DEMANDING	5.6
LOW-PAYING	5.5
SATISFYING	5.5
REWARDING	5.5
PLEASANT	5.3
ENJOYABLE	5.2
EXHAUSTING	5.2
SAFE	5.1

Caregivers expressed particular satisfaction with their opportunities to work with young children (83%), and with their relationships to co-workers. Ninety-three percent enjoyed the company of their co-workers and 82% described their relationship with co-workers as one of caring. Ninety-three percent described themselves as very committed to their work and 90% stated that they put a lot of extra effort into their work. A majority of caregivers were satisfied with their decision-making role. Seventy percent felt that their director valued their opinions and that they were encouraged to be self-sufficient in making decisions.

Caregivers were generally dissatisfied with their pay and promotion opportunities. Seventy-five percent viewed their pay as unfair considering the responsibilities of the job. Seventy-three percent thought they were being paid less than they deserved and 68% thought

their pay unfair considering their background and skills. Sixty-five percent described their opportunities for promotion as limited.

Child care staff did not perceive their jobs as having high social status. Seventy-two percent of staff felt that child care work was lower in status than all other jobs. Eighty percent of those with post-secondary qualifications felt the job had lower social status than other jobs, compared with 54% without any post-secondary experience. Directors (81%) perceived their job as having a lower status than did child caregivers (69%).

Centres

> ***The day care is very well organized, and equipment and materials are in good supply.***
>
> ***Our centre is located in a basement. The lack of sunlight is hard on your health. There is poor air circulation which contributes to poor health among children and workers.***

Directors described the location of their centre by type of building. In this study, centres were located as follows:

	PRIVATE	PUBLIC	TOTAL
SCHOOLS	2.5%	7.5%	10%
CHURCH	1.25%	3.75%	5%
HOUSE	7.5%	7.5%	15%
COMMERCIAL SPACE	36.25%	3.75%	40%
PURPOSE BUILT	22.5%	7.5%	30%
HOSPITAL	0%*		

**Although none appeared in this study, there were day care centres in Alberta located in hospitals.*

Monthly fees for child care centres in this sample varied from $225.00 per month to $450.00 per month. Average monthly fees for preschoolers was $280.00, $301.00 per month for infants.

Few differences, as they related to staffing characteristics, were found between centres based on location or size. When centre differences did occur, they were usually based on auspice.

Auspice

There was a significant difference between average monthly fees charged by private centres ($282.00) versus fees charged by public centres ($298.00).

Staff at public centres had more years of education than staff at private centres. How-

ever, there was no difference in centre auspice between those who had specialized early childhood training versus other types of post-secondary training.

Staff at private centres were less experienced than staff at public centres and fewer staff had been in the field for five or more years.

Staff at public centres received better wages, more benefits and had better working conditions than did staff at private centres. However, the turnover rate, as reported by directors was not significantly different between public and private centres.

Retention

❝

I enjoy the children very much. I would not give up this opportunity for anything.

This is a dead end profession that nobody really respects.

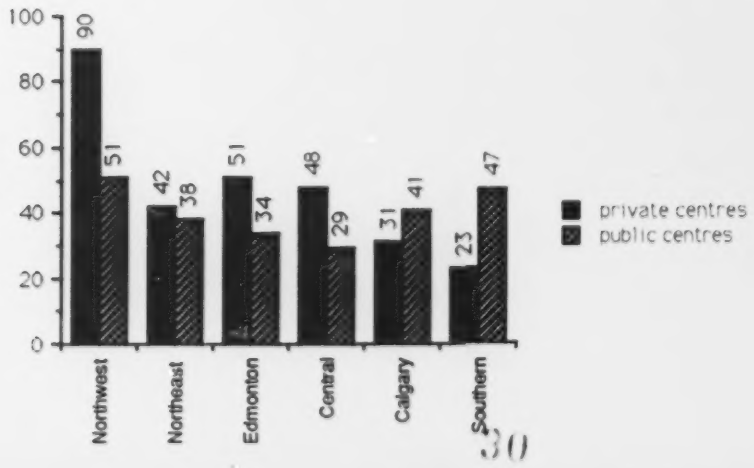
My main reason to leave would be because it is impossible to make really good friends – so many staff just come and go.

❞

Staff turnover rates were very high. Across all participating centres, directors reported a turnover rate of 43%. This figure is considerably higher that the 26% reported in 1988 by the Health and Social Services Disciplines Committee. Only five percent of directors reported no staff turnover in the previous 12 months. By contrast, 10% percent of directors reported a 100% turnover. The range in turnover rate was from 0% to 400%.

While reported turnover rates were slightly higher in the private sector (46% versus 41% for the public centres), no significant patterns based on auspice or location (rural versus urban) were apparent.

Turnover rates as reported by directors: By region and auspice of centre



To calculate the actual turnover rate, 100 caregivers who had completed the written questionnaires were contacted by telephone five months later, in May 1990. Seventy-eight were contacted directly, but 22 could not be reached and so the information was gathered from their last known place of employment.

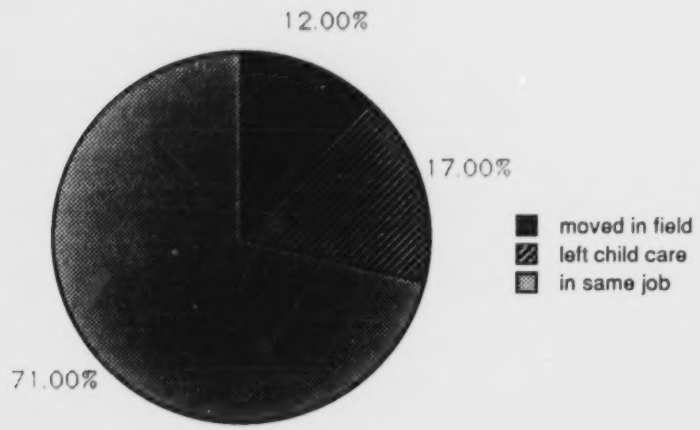
Of these 100 caregivers, 71 were still employed at the same job, 17 had left the child care field and 12 had moved into other child care-related employment. A further three caregivers indicated that they would be leaving the field at the end of the month.

Of the 17 who had left child care, 12 gave low pay as their primary reason for leaving, three quoted health as their primary reason and two gave personal reasons.

Of the 12 who remained in the field, seven moved to other day care centres, two received promotions which did not involve working directly with children, two became private nannies and one became an approved family day home provider.

These figures show a turnover rate of 29% in five months, 17% leaving the field and 12% moving within the field. Over a 12-month period this equates to a turnover rate of 69%, with 40% leaving the field completely. However, it is not known if the five-month period (January to May) is representative of job mobility patterns, and the sample was randomly selected from caregivers who had included their names and addresses on the written questionnaires.

Turnover rates: Five month follow-up with caregivers



The actual turnover rates as reported by directors and by caregivers were higher than stated intentions to stay in the field. Thirty-two percent of caregivers and 24% of directors reported their intention to stay in child care for only one more year; a further 6% of caregivers indicated that they would leave within one year.

When asked what factors would be important if they chose to leave their present job,

caregivers rated low salaries (81%), ill-health (62%), job stress (61%) and lack of benefits (51%) as the most important factors.

Recruitment

"

I think I spend most of my time hiring or advertising for staff.

I would like to hire trained staff, but they're impossible to find.

"

Directors were asked to describe the degree of difficulty they experienced in hiring child care staff. Ninety percent described recruitment of staff as very difficult (51%) or difficult (39%). Only 1% found it easy to hire new staff. Forty-seven percent of directors used an early childhood training criterion when they hired staff; they reported the same degree of difficulty in hiring as did directors who did not use any training criteria.

There was no significant difference in reported difficulty by location or auspice.

Attitude to training

"

People must be educated to work in this field.

I would very much like to upgrade my education in early childhood, but I can't afford to.

I like my job, but there is no way I'll go to university for two years for the salary provided. I would go into another field.

I feel making education accessible at night is important. Having child care courses would help people who aren't sure about the job.

"

One of the aims of this study was to describe caregivers' attitudes to the need for specialized training. Alberta had no training standards at the time of the survey, although two months after the data were collected the provincial government stated its intent to legislate training for all staff at day care centres (Alberta Family and Social Services, March 1990).

Eighty-seven percent of caregivers and 88% of directors supported training for day care personnel. Fifteen percent of caregivers and 13% of directors stated a willingness to leave their positions temporarily to complete training requirements at a college or university. A further 72% of caregivers and 75% of directors would complete training under certain conditions. One condition, that training be available locally and not involve leaving their present job, was stipulated by 44% of caregivers and by 52% of directors. The second condition, that they only complete training if funding support was made available, was stipulated by 42% of caregivers and by 71% of directors.

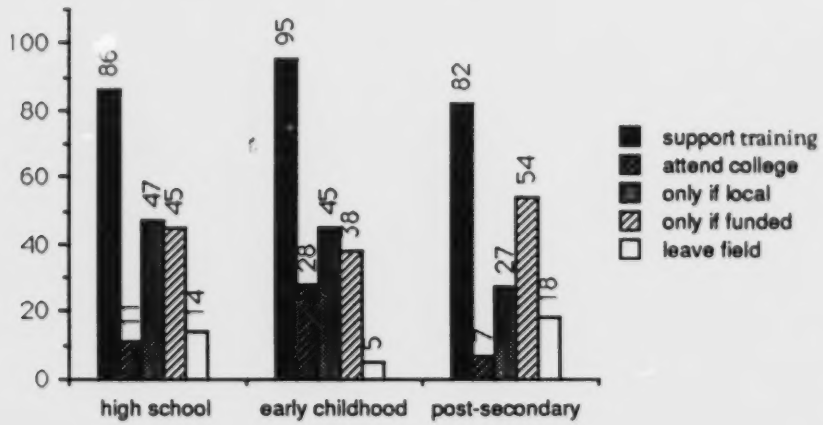
Only 12% of caregivers and 12% of directors stated that they would leave the field in the event that a training standard which they did not currently meet were introduced.

Almost all groups of child care staff expressed their strong support for training. Those most likely to leave, if a training standard which they did not meet was introduced, were directors without any post-secondary qualifications (38%) and staff with post-secondary qualifications which did not include any early childhood specialization (19%).

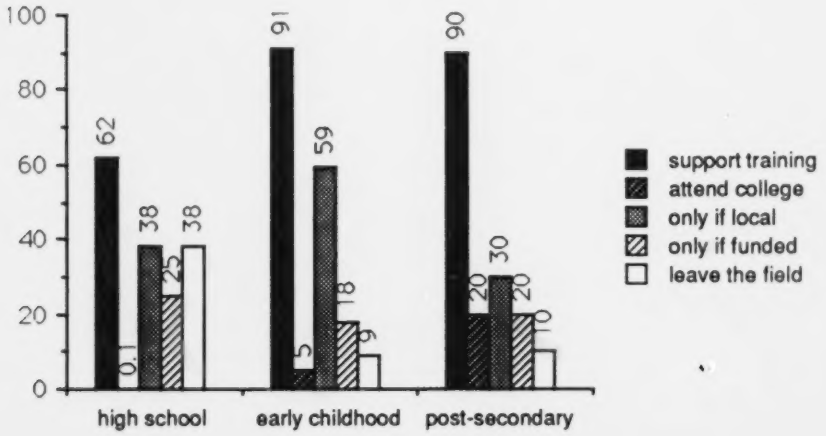
The most unconditional statements of support came from caregivers who already had some early childhood training – 95% in favour of training and 28% prepared to upgrade their skills at college or university, and from caregivers with two years of college education – 93% supported training and 21% prepared to return to college or university to upgrade their qualifications.

Caregivers with no post-secondary qualifications or background were also supportive of training. Eleven percent would be willing to leave their jobs temporarily to gain the necessary qualifications from college or university, 47% would complete training if it did not require leaving their job and 45% stated the condition of funding support. Only 14% would quit their jobs if training were introduced.

Caregivers' attitudes to training by education level, education type and centre auspice



Directors attitudes to training by education level, education type and centre auspice



As a further gauge of attitudes towards training, staff were asked to rate the extent to which their current level of education contributed to their ability to work effectively with children.

Ten percent of caregivers described their current education as being not at all useful, 36% said it helped a little and 53% said it helped to a great extent.

Eighty-four percent of caregivers with specialized early childhood training described their education as helping to a great extent and only 1.3% described their education as not useful. By comparison, 65% of caregivers with post-secondary qualifications which did not include early childhood training found their education very helpful, and none described it as not useful.

Thirty-one percent of caregivers without post-secondary qualifications described their education as not useful. Only 24% described their education level as being very helpful.

Part-time staff

Directors reported that approximately 10% of caregivers worked less than full-time.

Ninety-seven percent of part-time caregivers were female. Seventy percent were 40 years of age or younger, with the largest group (38%) between 18 and 25 years. Sixty-seven percent were married or living with a partner, 18% had children under six years of age living at home and 49% had school age children living at home.

The education levels of part-time staff were similar to those of full-time caregivers. Thirty-three percent had post-secondary qualifications, 20% specifically in early childhood. A

further 17% were engaged in post-secondary studies.

Mobility within the field was also a factor with part-time staff. Fifty-six percent had been at the present centre for less than one year, but only 22% had been in child care for less than one year. Slightly more than 50% had worked in child care for five or more years.

Part-time staff were less likely to participate in professional activities. Apart from completing a first-aid course (48%), fewer than 25% participated in any professional activities.

Part-time staff worked for an average of 24 hours per week and earned an average of $6.49 per hour. The range of work hours and salaries was very wide. Part-time caregivers worked from seven to 35 hours per week and earned between $4.50 and $13.40 per hour. Like their full-time co-workers, many were unsure how pay increases were determined (51%), although 28% indicated that more experience and education resulted in pay increases. Only 18% received a regular cost of living increase.

The most usual working conditions available to part-time staff were paid breaks (66%), staff meetings during regular work hours (43%) and compensation for overtime worked (36%). All other conditions were available to less than 33% of part-time staff, including professional development funding, written contracts and job descriptions.

The average number of benefits received by part-time caregivers was 1.2. Thirty-two percent received no benefits and 30% received only one. The benefits most likely to be available were sick leave (36%) and dental coverage (26%).

Although fewer part-time caregivers viewed work in child care as long-term (56%), they expressed commitment and satisfaction with many aspects of their work. Eighty-seven percent were attracted by the opportunity to work with children, 77% enjoyed the company of co-workers and 72% would recommend a child care career to a friend.

Part-time staff were more satisfied with their level of pay. Fifty-two percent considered that they were paid fairly. They were less likely to view the status of child care as lower than other jobs (52%), but believed that improving wages (87%) and benefits (68%) would encourage more people to stay in child care.

Only 13% would leave child care rather than upgrade their education if training standards were introduced. Of the eighty-seven percent who supported training, 13% would return to college, 51% would take courses only if they were available locally and 23% wanted financial support.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

FOUR MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS EMERGED FROM THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY *THOSE WHO CARE*. THESE RECOMMENDATIONS ARE RESTRICTED TO IDEAS FOR ADDITIONAL STUDIES.

➤ An investigation and examination of the differences between child day care centres, particularly as they relate to staff hiring practices and to budgetary limitations.

Major differences in the educational levels of caregivers and in their compensation were related to the sponsorship of the centre, but not to centre size or location.

➤ An examination of the extent to which characteristics of caregivers and the environments in which they work (as found in this study) affect the standards of care provided for children.

A more extensive study (Whitebook et al., 1989), has established strong links between caregiver characteristics, centre characteristics and quality of care.

➤ An examination of the effects of different levels and types of post-secondary education on the quality of care provided for children.

➤ A description of the specific tasks and roles undertaken by caregivers at day care centres.

CONCLUSION

This study was intended to describe child day care personnel and their work environments. It made no attempt to examine the relationships of these characteristics to the quality of care provided for children or to child development outcomes.

Child caregivers in Alberta had more years of education and more post-secondary qualifications than the general adult population. They overwhelmingly supported the idea of additional education and qualification for centre staff, so long as educational opportunities were not prohibited by cost or distance.

The lack of traditional recognition for their work, as reflected by low wages, a lack of benefits and unsatisfactory working conditions, added tension to a field of dedicated caregivers. Those with early childhood post-secondary qualifications and those who were employed by public centres received better compensation than caregivers with no post-secondary qualifications and those who were employed by private centres.

These factors, together with caregivers' perceptions that they were not accorded the status they deserved, led to many choosing to leave child care.

Although they expressed strong dissatisfaction with many external aspects of their jobs, caregivers considered their work to be important, rewarding and interesting. They particularly enjoyed the opportunities to work with young children and with their co-workers.

The sponsorship of the centre in which they were employed was key in determining the pay and working conditions of caregivers. Other centre features, such as size and location, made little difference to pay and working conditions.

While this study did not examine the relationships between these characteristics and the quality of care provided for children, these relationships have been reported elsewhere. *The National Child Care Staffing Study* (Whitebook et al., 1989), using many of the questions that were included in this study, concluded that:

> ***The most important predictor of child care quality and turnover is staff wages.***
>
> ***Teaching staff with more formal education and higher levels of specialized early childhood training interacted more effectively with children.***
>
> ***Staff wages and child-adult ratios were the key predictors of the quality of services centres provided.***

In 1979, the Canadian Commission for the International Year of the Child described the position of child caregivers in its report, *For Canada's Children*. The Commission writes:

> ***At present, child care workers and other caregivers are chronically under-paid, largely because they replace parents who are paid nothing for their work as caregivers. A mother's work in the home is not counted in the gross national product, she receives no pensions or benefits and her experience counts for little in the job market. Society expects a mother's reward to be her joy in her work, and this attitude extends to child care workers. But child care is important work, and those who care for children should be valued accordingly. (Canadian Commission for the International Year of the Child, 1979, p 53).***

It would appear that the role and position of child caregivers has changed little in the past decade, in spite of burgeoning demands for more and better quality child care.

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